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TESTIMONY OF THE

BRIDGEPORT CHILD ADVOCACY COALITION

TO THE

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

FEBRUARY 23, 2009

Testimony of Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition For Planning and Development Committee

The Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition (BCAC) appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony about a very important issue -- the issue of protection of tenant possessions after an eviction -- to the Planning and Development Committee of the 2009 General Assembly.

As you all know, these are VERY difficult economic times. We see the impact of the recession every day in Bridgeport:

- Businesses downsizing or closing their doors altogether.
- An unemployment rate over 10% and rising in Bridgeport.
- The growing numbers of unemployed who are laid off flooding job centers and unemployment offices.
- And the increasing numbers of laid-off workers who get behind in their rent due to job losses being evicted.

And every week, things just get worse and worse. And we haven't seen the bottom yet. I fear what that will look like in Bridgeport and in Connecticut's other large cities and poorer smaller communities.

In times like these, low-income families (formerly the working poor) are the most vulnerable. Renters are families without the means to purchase a home. They are the workers with entry level jobs or low-paying service sector jobs. Eviction is traumatic enough sending them like nomads to be turned away from overcrowded homeless shelters and sending them trekking from one family member and friend to another to find a place to stay.

They have few resources. Their possessions are all they have. If they have a car, they can load it up. For many renters in cities like Bridgeport, they have no car and can only take what they can carry, often a garbage bag stuffed with some clothes or precious possessions, their children clutching a favorite toy or stuffed animal.

There are bills before this committee that would result in evicted tenants losing their possessions and leaving them with nothing. We know they do not have the resources to replace what they have accumulated over their lifetime. I ask you to consider for a moment how you would feel if you were going to lose everything in your house except what you could carry out holding it in your hands. Can you imagine how devastated children feel just being evicted from their home. Now add losing all of their toys and clothes to that picture. It is a sobering picture. And it is an overwhelming situation for poor families and their children.

We strongly urge you NOT to remove the protection for the possessions of these low-income families and their children suffering eviction. Continue the current system that requires the municipality to store the possessions of evicted tenants for at least 15 days so that once they find temporary shelter, they can arrange storage with family or friends and then come back to claim their possessions.

The current system also protects the possessions of homeowners who are evicted through foreclosure. Bridgeport is the foreclosure capital of Connecticut right now, with more than 1,000 homes foreclosed. The current system protects these families from immediately losing all of their possessions.

Please decide that it is the policy of the State of Connecticut to protect the meager possessions of poor families who are being evicted by retaining the current system. We oppose all bills that would take away this protection from tenants.

Thank you this opportunity to submit our testimony.

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The Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition is a coalition of more than 80 member organizations dedicated to improving the well-being of Bridgeport's children through research, advocacy, community education and mobilization.